



Mobility Turn

A Nexus Between Social
Sciences and the Built
Environment

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Introduction

Mobility is often described as a contemporary model in the social sciences that explores the movement of people, ideas and goods, as well as the broader social implications of those movements.

Mobility turn can be described as a shift in thinking within the social sciences that views the world as fluid and always in motion. It argues that rather than examining people, society, and economy as if rooted in places, there is a need to recognize that life consists of mobile practices. People are mobile subjects who constantly move about to interact, work and consume. The turn draws together all forms of movement and circulation and theorizes them holistically and relationally, rather than as separate, discrete forms of action associated with particular activities.

The latest upsurge in the interest in different forms of mobility in the modern world draws close focus on the role of the built environment in championing this shift.

This article seeks to understand how we can integrate transport studies with social sciences in a more holistic approach to ensure social inclusion, safety, convenience and sustainability in our transport systems.

Mobility Turn Trends in Africa

Although Africa is characterized by undeveloped transport networks, mobility volume increases by the day due to factors such as immigration, rural-urban migration and tourism.

The constant gradual growth in mobility can be attributed to the following;

- The growth of automobility throughout the world
- The rapid growth of affordable air travel due to public private partnerships.
- A significant resurgence of rail transport such as the standard gauge railways and high-speed trains.
- Tourism - New kinds of globally significant themed leisure environments such as the coastal regions and safari parks.
- Increased port activities that include shipping of manufactured goods.
- Increased carbon use within transport, which accounts for 24 per cent of total greenhouse emissions.

The Disconnect

As transport studies mainly focuses on analyzing demand and supply, mobility turn, in the opinion of its enthusiasts, provides an answer to the growing need for the insertion of the “social” into analyzing travel and transport.

Cresswell (2011, 551) outlines four main disconnects between mobility and traditional transportation analysis;

- Mobilities often links across different scales of movement, while traditional transportation geography tends to focus on particular forms of movement at only one scale (such as local traffic studies or household travel surveys).
- Mobilities encompasses the movement of people, objects, and ideas, rather than narrowly focusing on areas like passenger modal shift or freight logistics.
- Mobilities often links science and social science to the humanities.
- Mobilities considers both motion and "stopping, stillness and relative immobility."

The car, at the height of its hegemony, stood for individualism, liberty, privacy, separation, and selfishness in their most socially dysfunctional, although insidiously seductive, form (Judt 2011b: 48). In this context, there is need to integrate the social aspect in formulating solutions to curb modern transport challenges.

Conclusion

From the article, it is evident that mobility turn can alter the main objective of an analysis in the built environment disciplines which ultimately may result in a better comprehension of the subject matter. This may draw attention to social exclusion barriers and inspire a public debate about public provision of an inclusive mobility infrastructure.

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